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Vashchenko et al.

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(54) **METHOD OF FORMING A VARACTOR WITH AN INCREASED LINEAR TUNING RANGE**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 438/153, 438/154, 163, 184, 185, 379
See application file for complete search history.

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(*) **Notice:** Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 45 days.

(21) **Appl. No.:** **10/634,948**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(22) **Filed:** **Aug. 5, 2003**

The linear tuning range of a semiconductor varactor is substantially increased by forming a lightly-doped drain region of a first conductivity type in a semiconductor material of a second conductivity type between a heavily-doped diffusion of the second conductivity type and a lower-plate region of the semiconductor material.

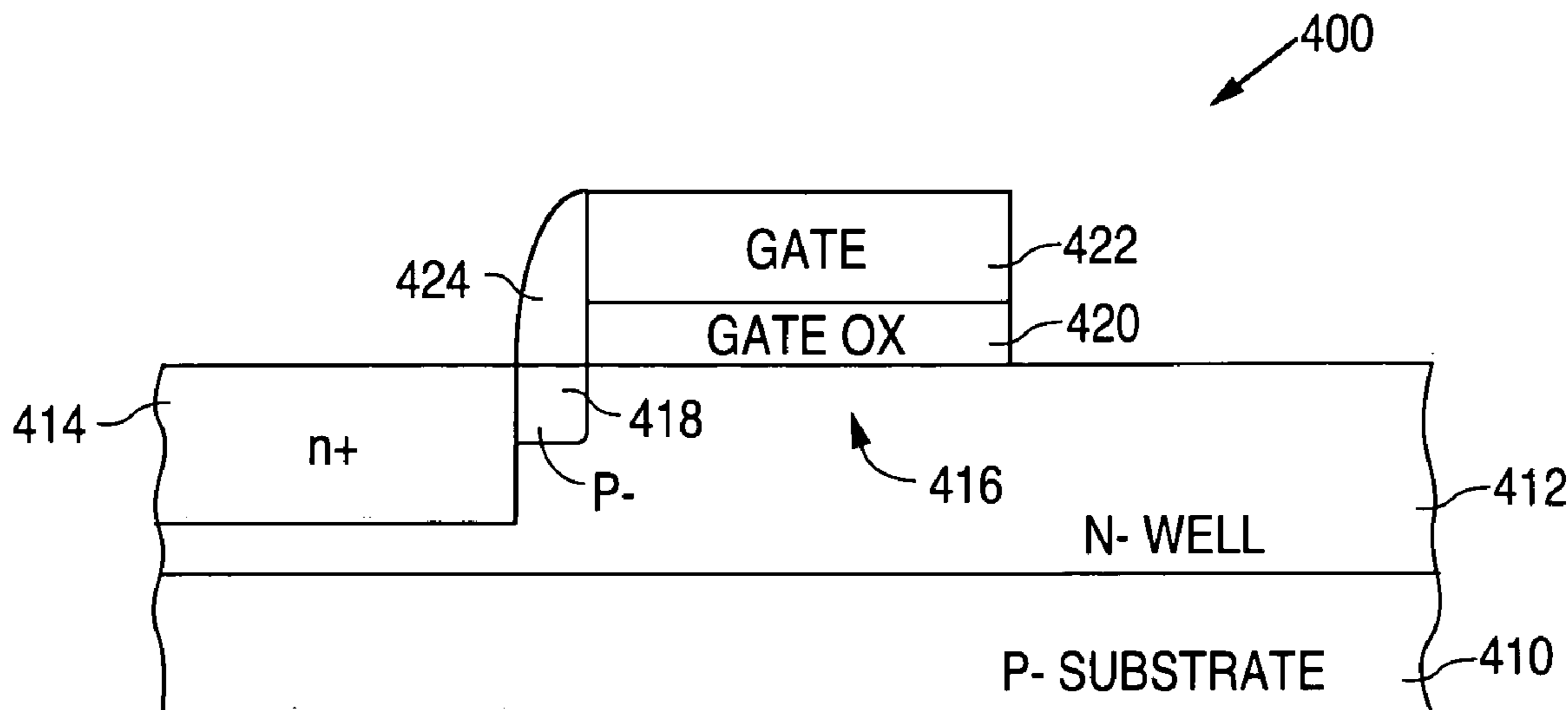
Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 09/866,148, filed on May 24, 2001, now Pat. No. 6,653,716.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
H01L 21/18 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 438/379

15 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



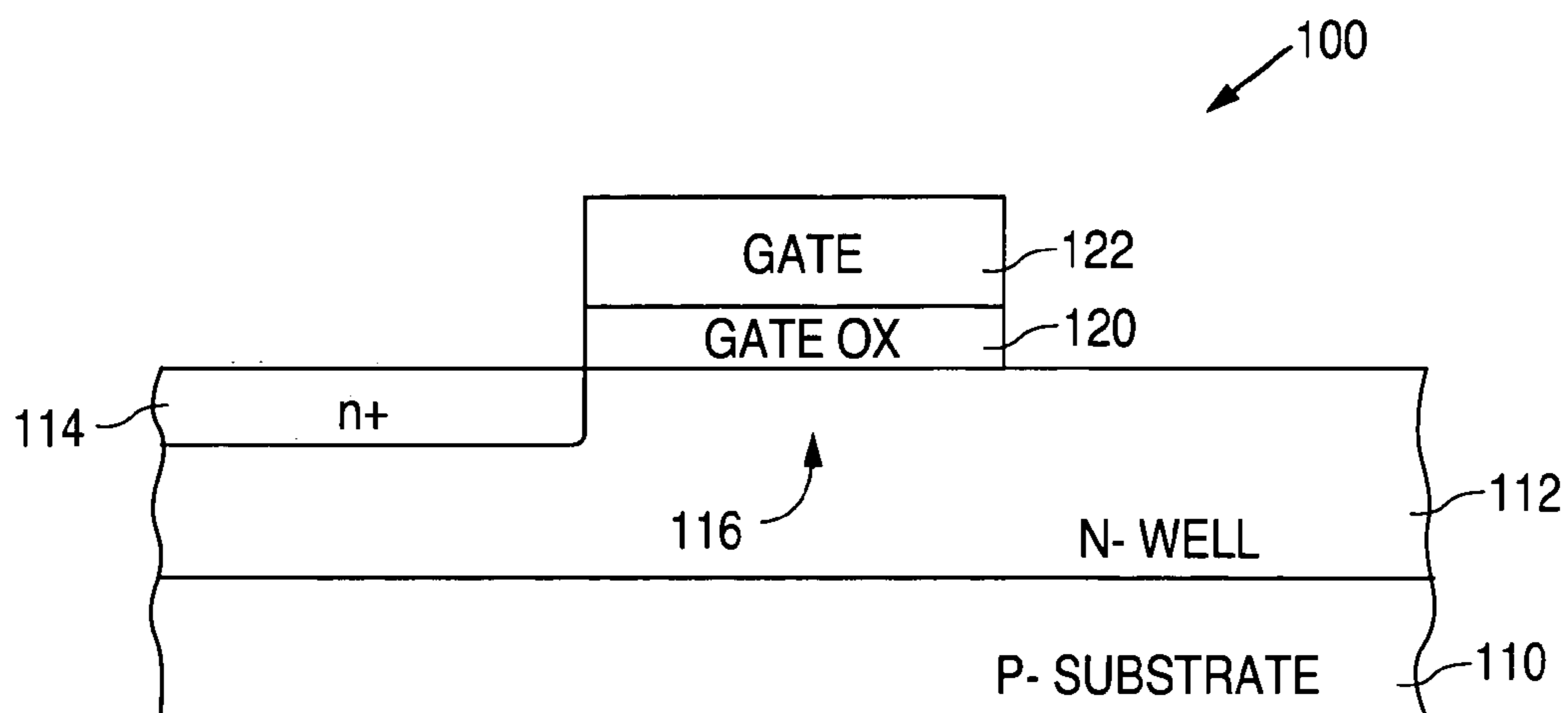


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

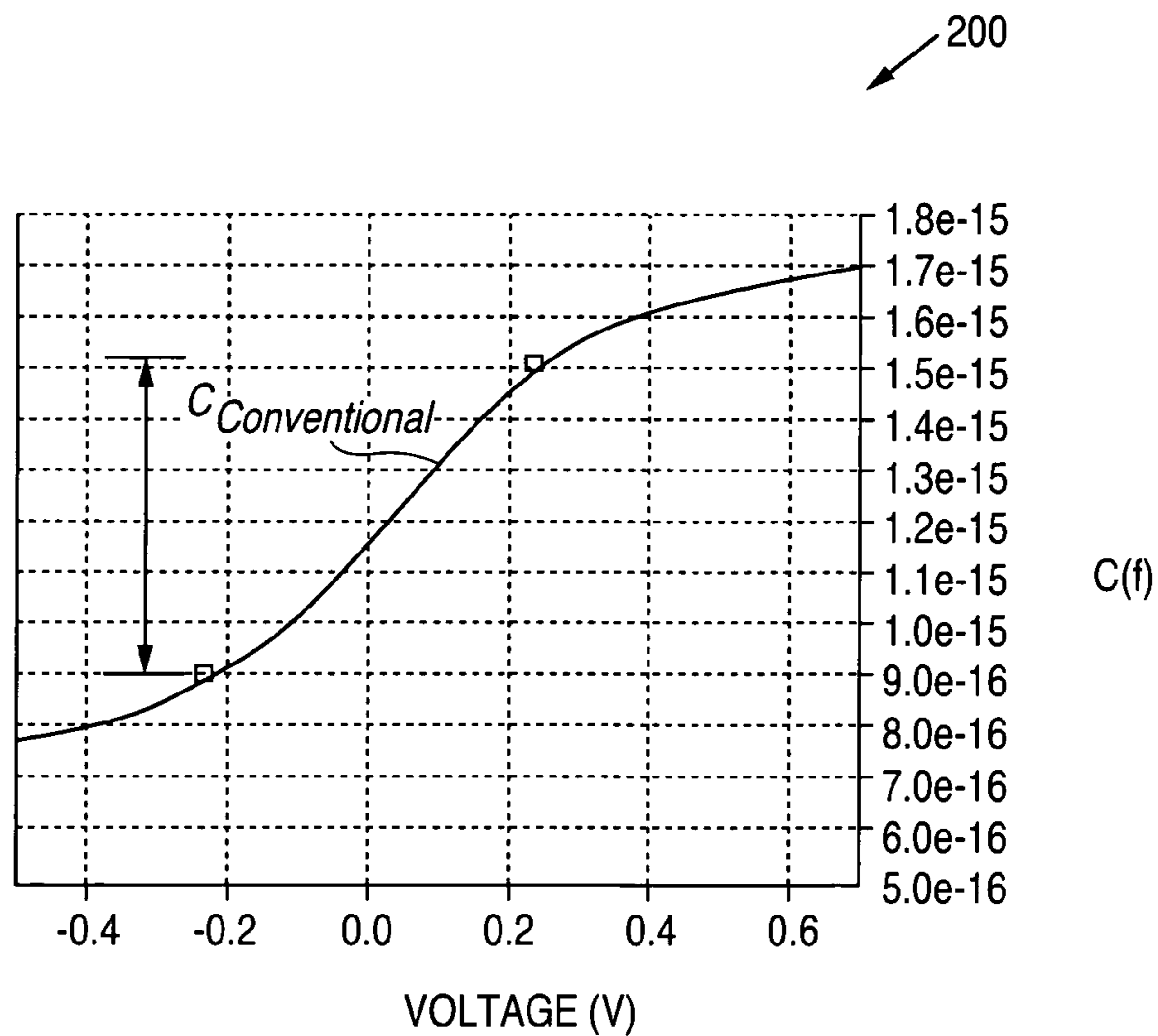


FIG. 2
(PRIOR ART)

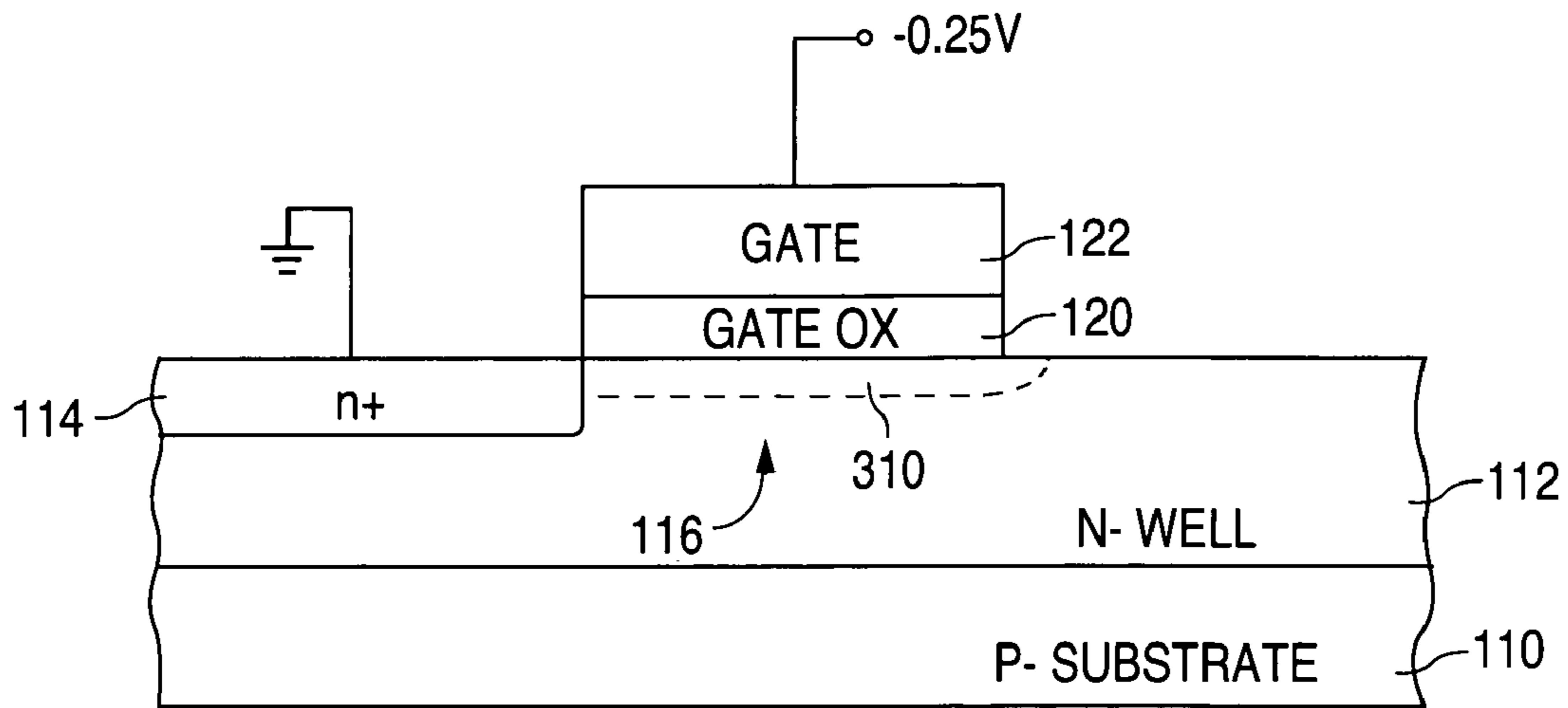


FIG. 3A
(PRIOR ART)

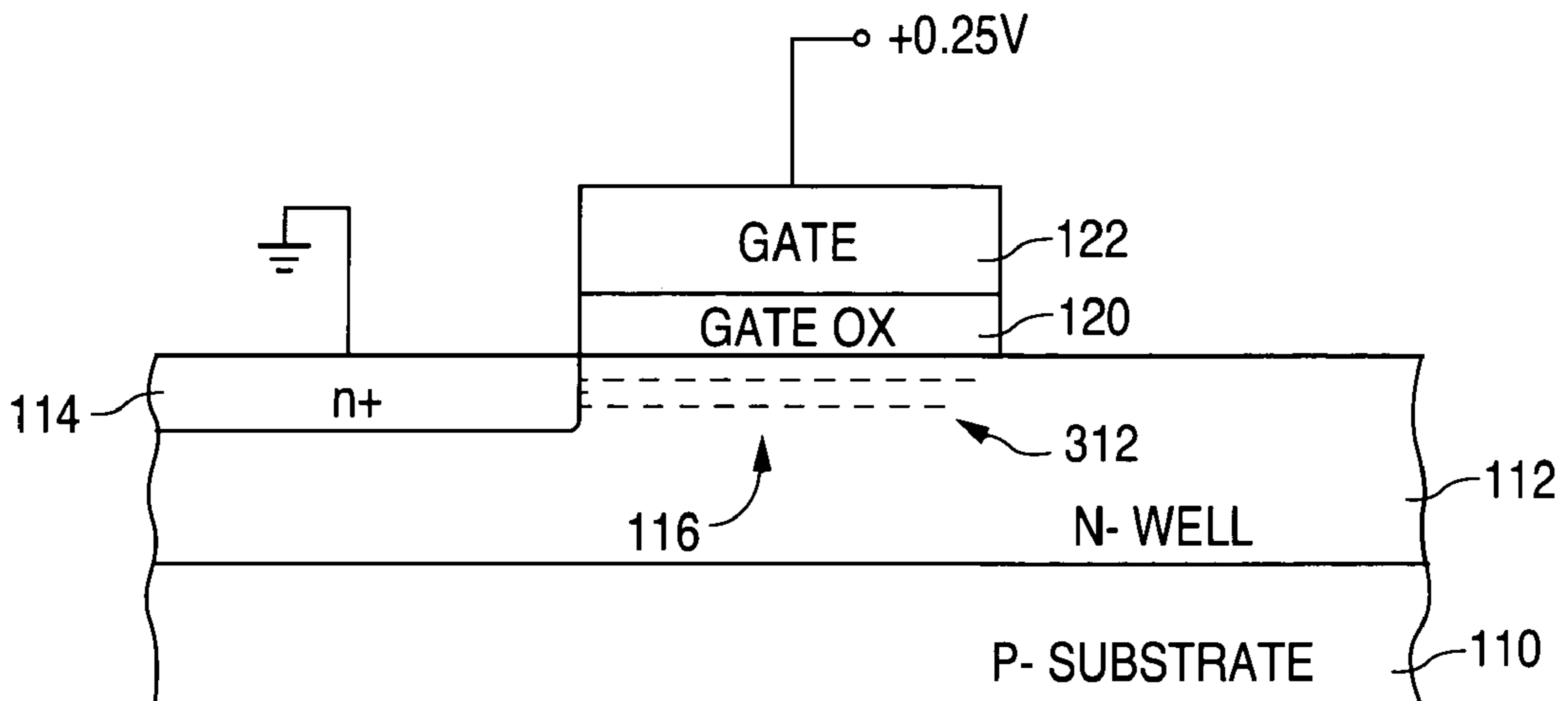


FIG. 3B
(PRIOR ART)

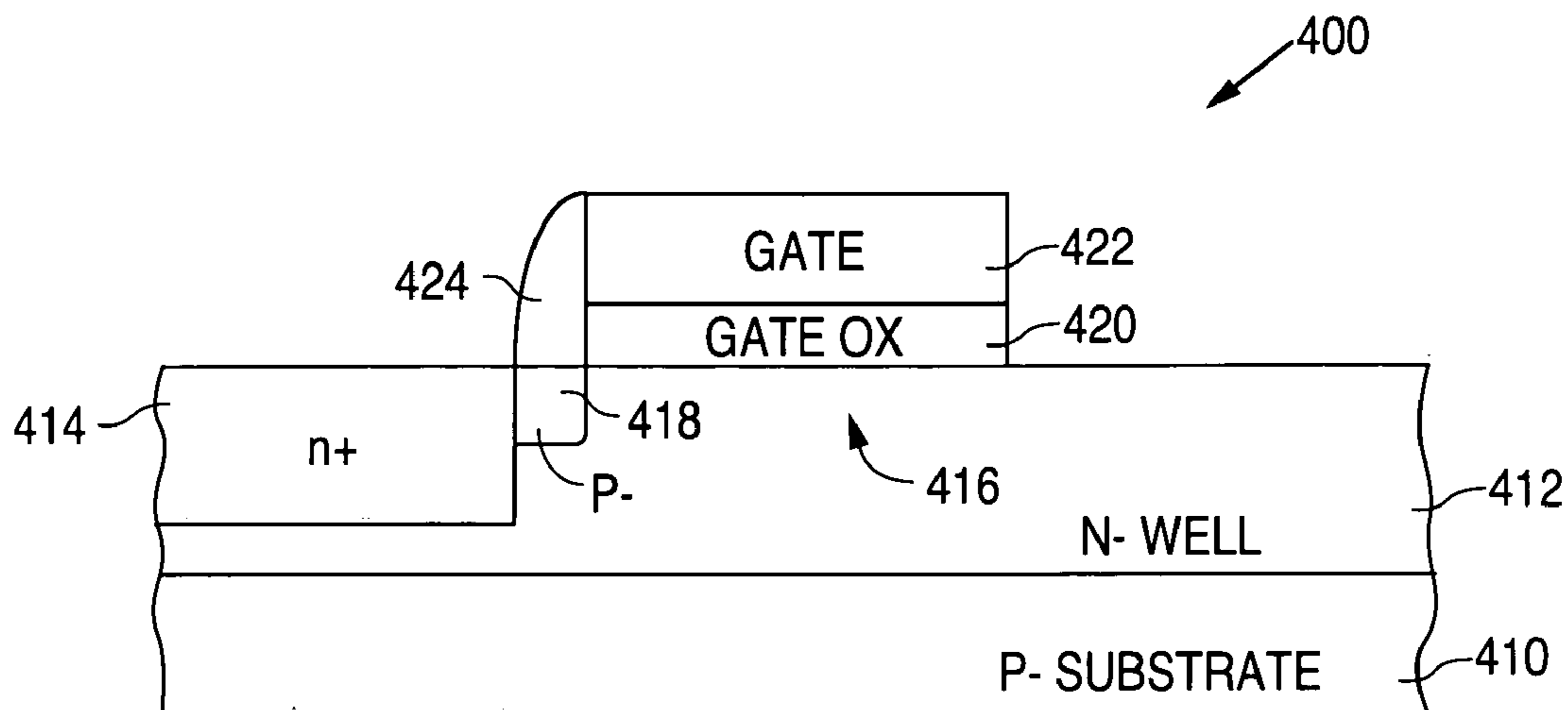


FIG. 4

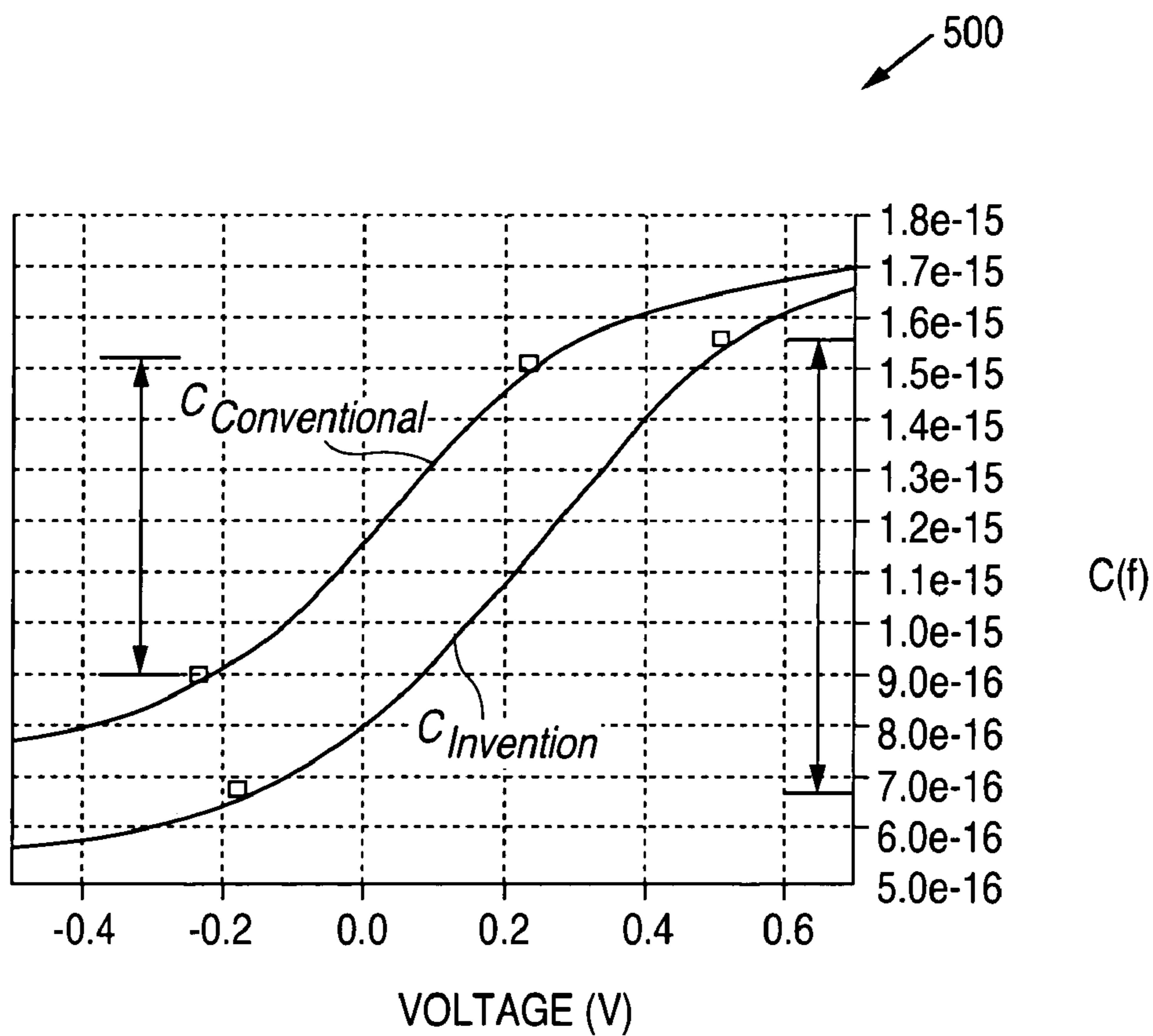


FIG. 5

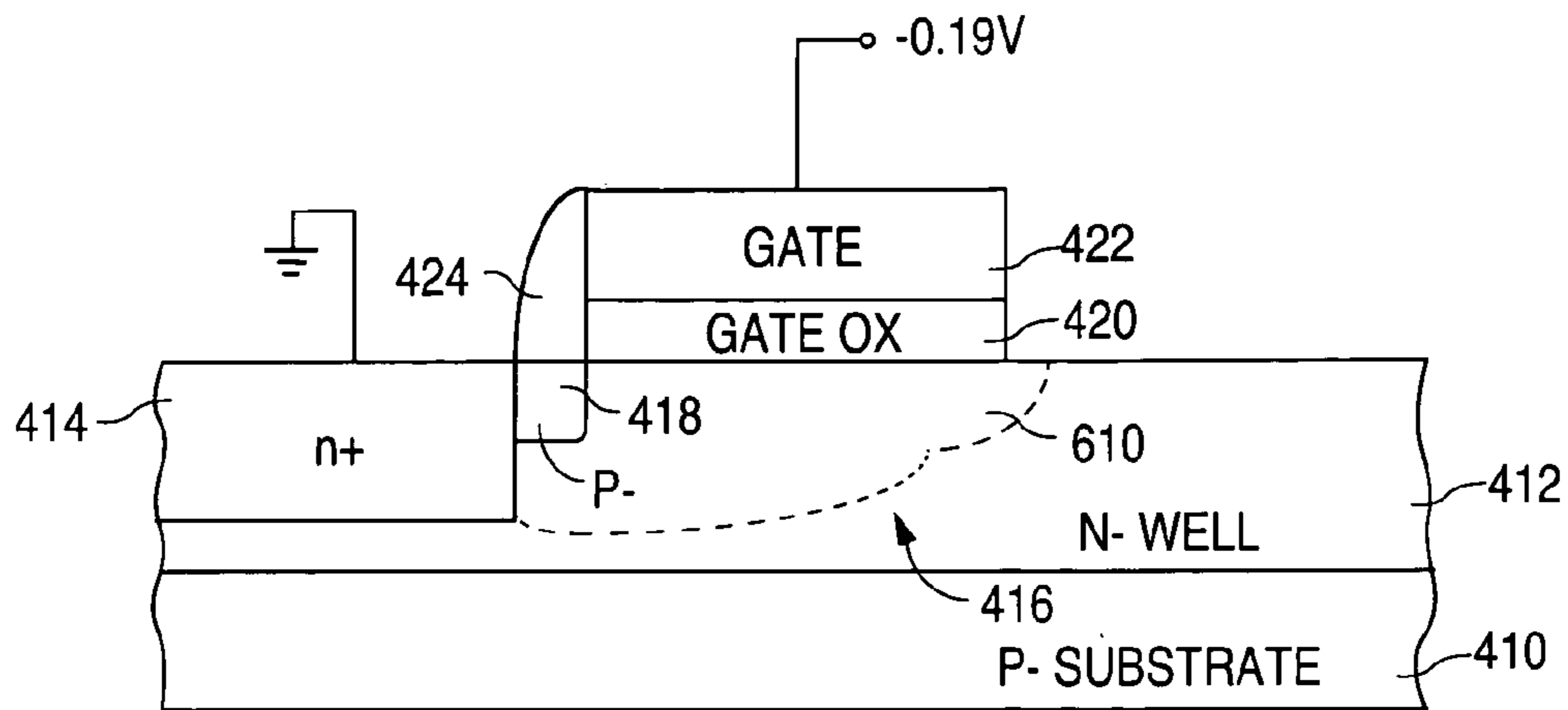


FIG. 6A

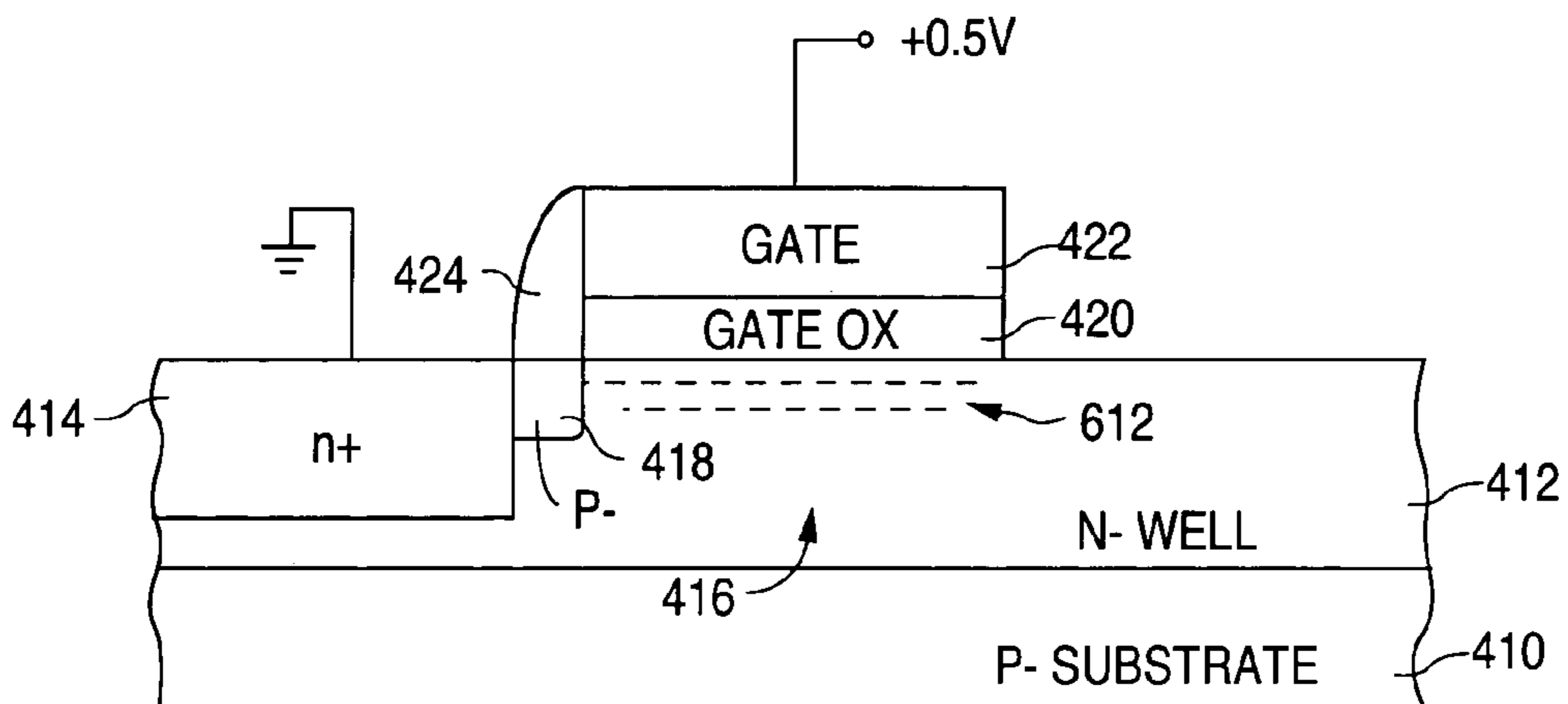


FIG. 6B

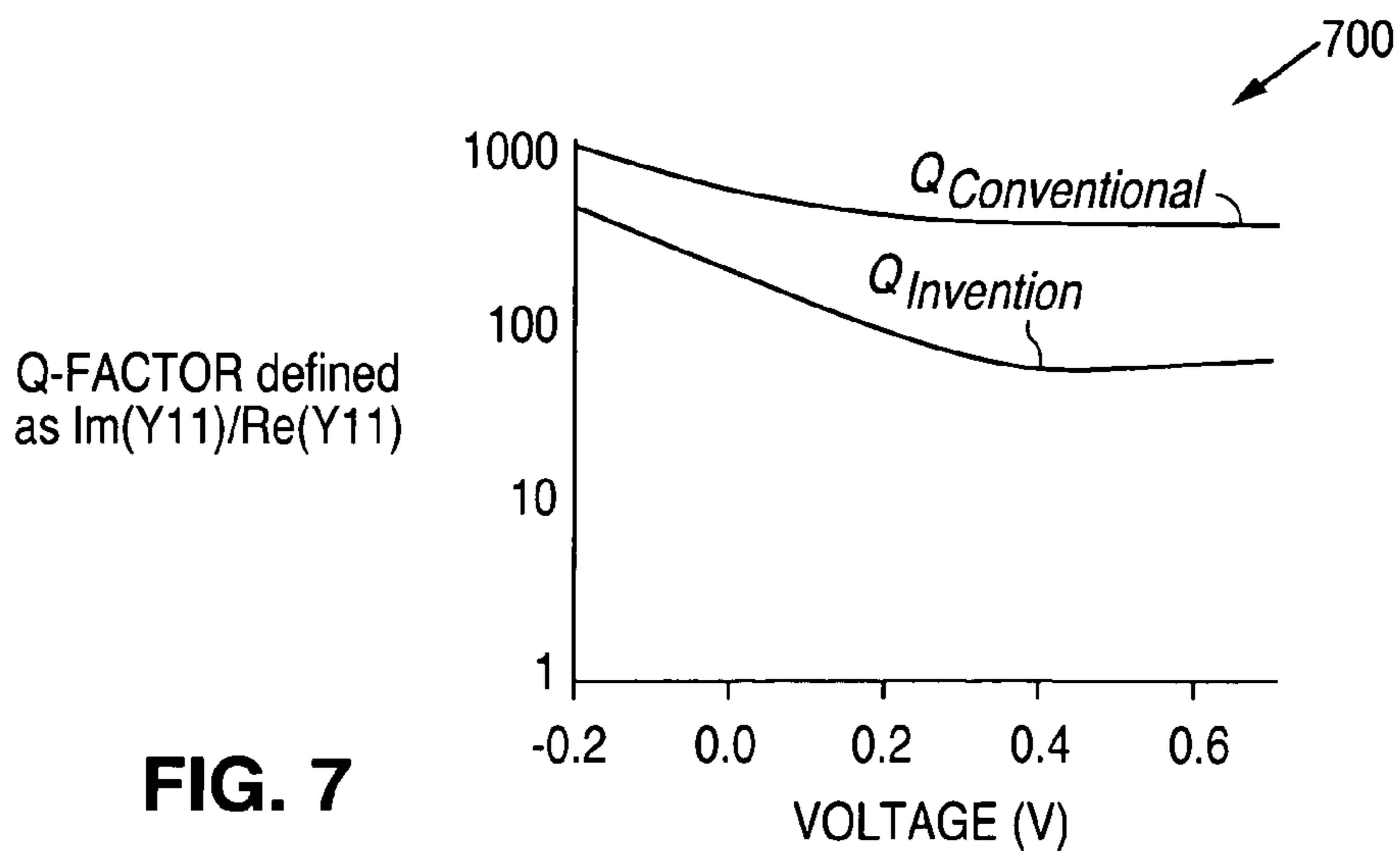


FIG. 7

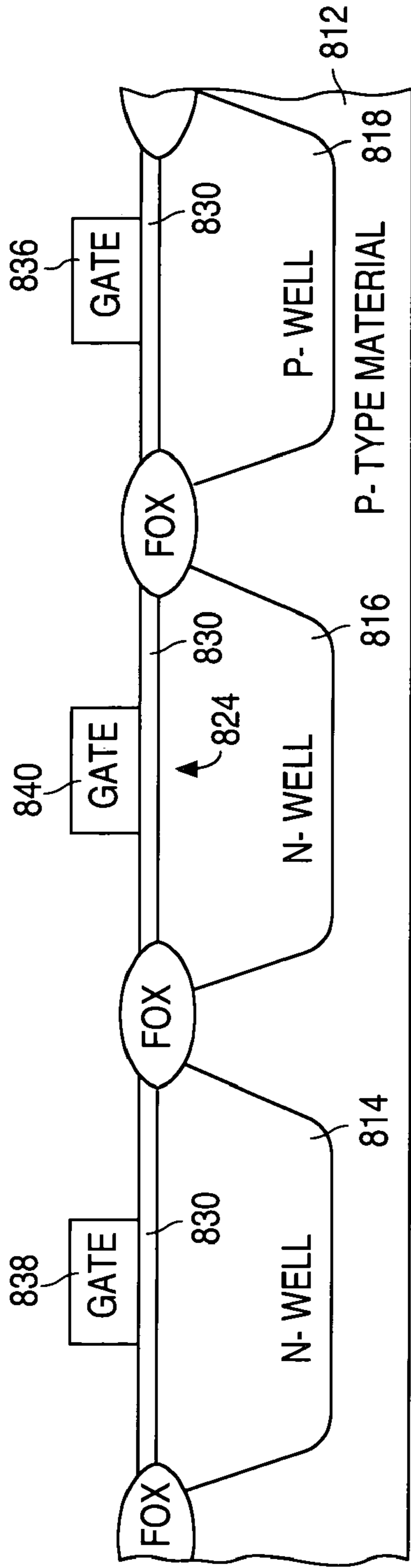


FIG. 8C

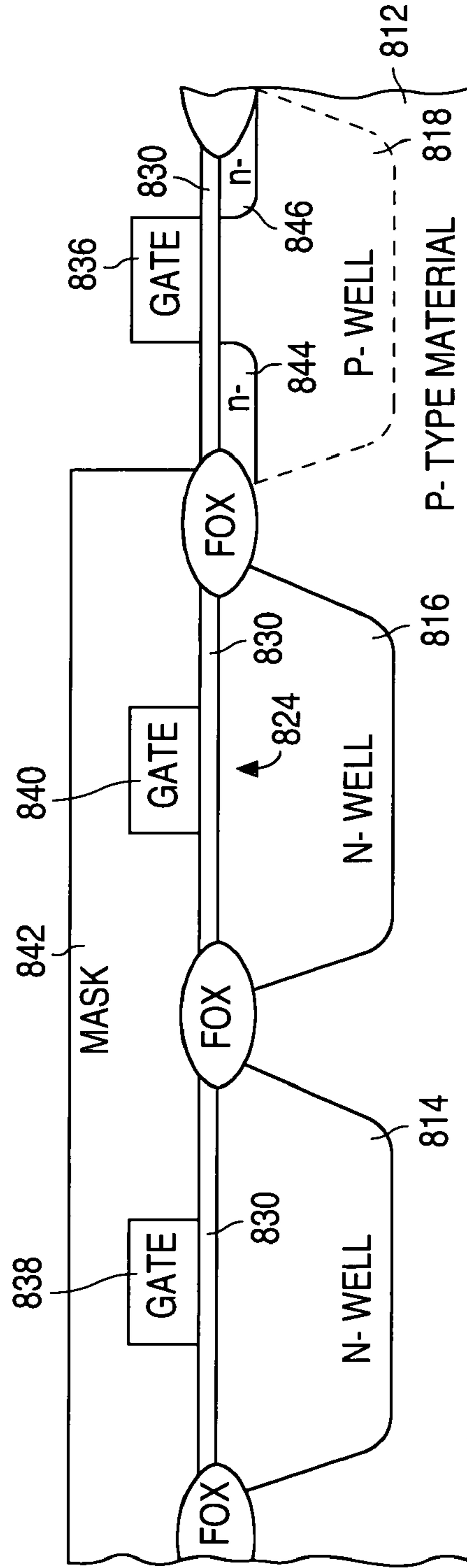


FIG. 8D

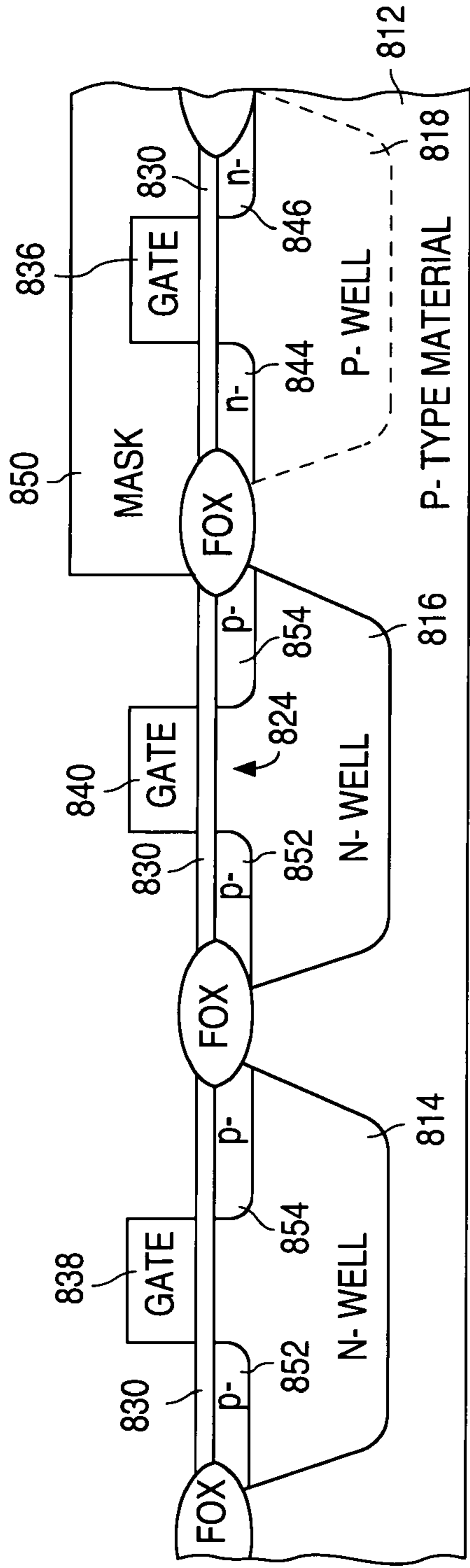


FIG. 8E

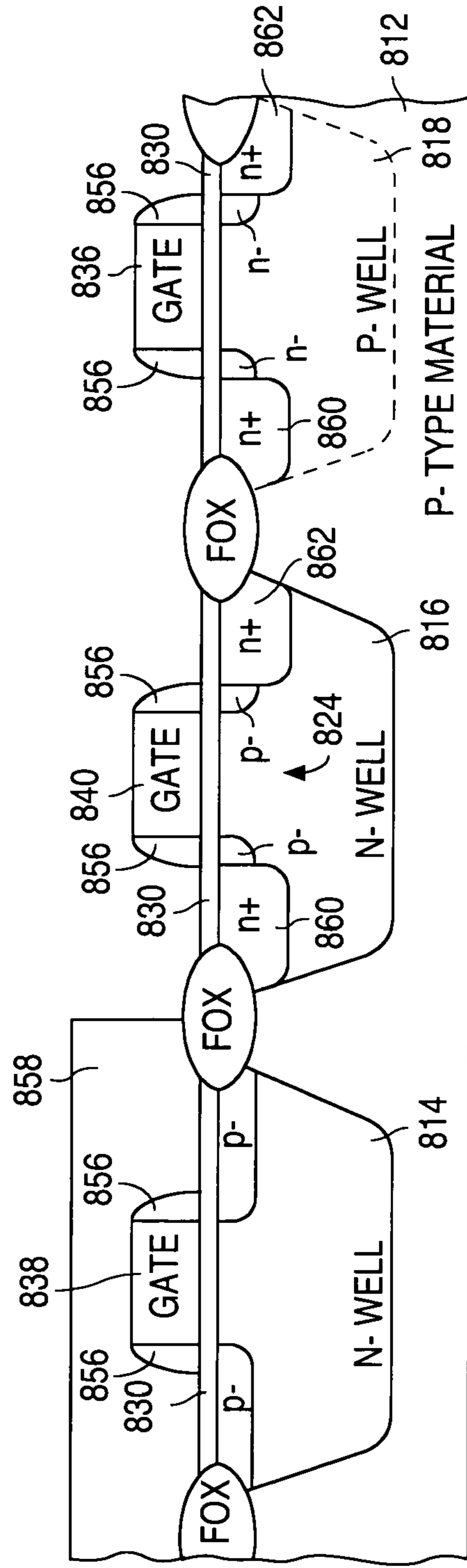


FIG. 8F

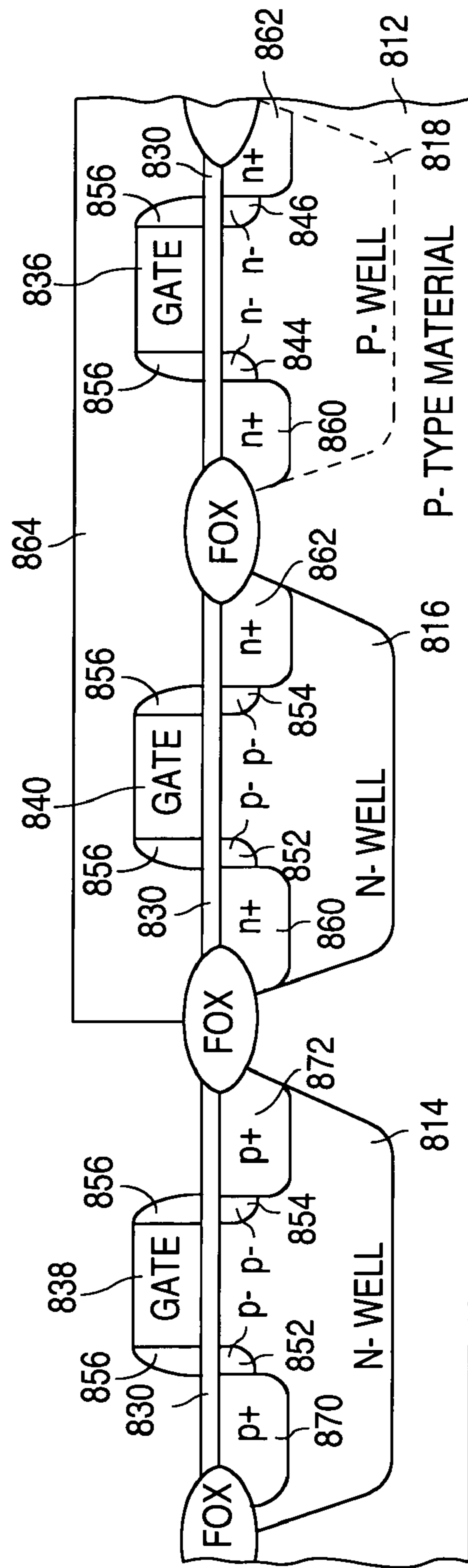


FIG. 8G

METHOD OF FORMING A VARACTOR WITH AN INCREASED LINEAR TUNING RANGE

This is a divisional application of application Ser. No. 09/866,148 filed on May 24, 2001, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,653,716.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to semiconductor varactors and, more particularly, to a varactor and a method of forming a varactor with an increased linear tuning range.

2. Description of the Related Art

A varactor is a semiconductor device that has a voltage-controlled capacitance. As a result, the capacitance across the device varies as the voltage across the device varies. Varactors are commonly used in the voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) circuits of phase-locked loops (PLLs) which, in turn, are commonly used in high-frequency applications, such as with cellular phones.

FIG. 1 shows a cross-sectional diagram that illustrates a conventional NMOS varactor **100**. As shown in FIG. 1, varactor **100**, which is formed in a p- substrate **110**, includes a n- well **112** that is formed in substrate **110**, and an n+ diffusion region **114** which is formed in n- well **112**. N- well **112**, in turn, is defined to have a lower-plate region **116** that adjoins n+ diffusion region **114**. In addition, varactor **100** also includes a layer of gate oxide **120** that is formed on n- well **112** over lower-plate region **116**, and an upper-plate gate **122** that is formed on gate oxide layer **120**.

FIG. 2 shows a graph **200** that illustrates the operation of varactor **100**. Graph **200** utilizes a line $C_{CONVENTIONAL}$ to identify the capacitance (C) across varactor **100** for a voltage V across varactor **100**. As shown in FIG. 2, when the voltage V across varactor **100** ranges from a negative value to a positive value, the capacitance C across varactor **100** increases. For example, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **114** and a voltage ranging from $-0.5V$ to $+0.7$ is applied to gate **122**, the capacitance C increases from approximately 7.7×10^{-16} farads to approximately 1.7×10^{-15} farads.

In addition, as further shown in FIG. 2, varactor **100** also has a substantially linear region of operation. For example, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **114** and a voltage ranging from $-0.25V$ to $+0.25V$ is applied to gate **122**, the capacitance C substantially linearly increases from approximately 9.0×10^{-16} farads to approximately 1.5×10^{-15} farads as shown by line $C_{CONVENTIONAL}$.

FIGS. 3A-3B shows cross-sectional diagrams that illustrate the operation of varactor **100** at the linear endpoints. As shown in FIG. 3A, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **114** and the lower linear endpoint of $-0.25V$ is applied to upper-plate gate **118**, the negative voltage causes a depletion region **310** to be formed in the lower-plate region **116** of n- well **112**. The capacitance of varactor **100** in this condition is defined by the thickness of gate oxide layer **120** and the charge on lower-plate region **116** which, in turn, is defined by depletion region **310**.

By contrast, as shown in FIG. 3B, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **114** and the upper linear endpoint of $+0.25V$ is applied to upper-plate gate **118**, the positive voltage causes a negative charge **312** to collect (or accumulate) in the lower-plate region **116** of n- well **112**. Thus, as shown in FIGS. 3A and 3B, the capacitance of varactor **100** varies with the voltage across varactor **100** because as the

voltage on gate **122** is varied, the charge level present in the lower-plate region **116** of n- well **112** also varies.

One of the advantages of varactor **100** is that varactor **100** can easily be integrated into a standard CMOS or BiCMOS fabrication process. N- well **112** can be formed at the same time that the wells for the PMOS transistors are formed, while n+ diffusion region **114** can be formed at the same time that the source and drain regions for the NMOS transistors are formed. In addition, gate oxide layer **120** and gate **122** can be formed at the same time that the oxide layer and MOS gates are formed.

One of the disadvantages of varactor **100** is that varactor **100** provides a relatively small linear tuning range, ranging only from approximately 9.0×10^{-16} farads to approximately 1.5×10^{-15} farads. If a greater or lesser amount of capacitance is required, a more complicated structure is required. As a result, there is a need for a varactor with a larger linear tuning range that remains easily integratable into a standard CMOS or BiCMOS fabrication process.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional diagram illustrating a conventional NMOS varactor **100**.

FIG. 2 is a graph **200** illustrating the operation of varactor **100**.

FIGS. 3A-3B are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating the operation of varactor **100** at the linear endpoints.

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional diagram illustrating a varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a graph **500** illustrating the operation of varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention.

FIGS. 6A-6B are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating the operation of varactor **400** at the linear endpoints in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a graph **700** further illustrating the operation of varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention.

FIGS. 8A-8G are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating a method of forming a circuit **800** in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 4 shows a cross-sectional diagram that illustrates a varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention. As shown in FIG. 4, varactor **400**, which is formed in a p-material **410**, includes a n- well **412** that is formed in material **410**, and an n+ diffusion region **414** which is formed in n- well **412**. N- well **412**, in turn, is defined to have a lower-plate region **416**.

In accordance with the present invention, varactor **400** also includes a p- lightly-doped drain (PLDD) diffusion region **418** that is formed in n- well **412** between n+ diffusion region **414** and lower-plate region **416**. As described in greater detail below, PLDD diffusion region **418** increases the size of the depletion region resulting from a negative gate voltage which, in turn, increases the tuning range of varactor **400**.

In addition, varactor **400** also includes a layer of gate oxide **420** that is formed on n- well **412** over lower-plate region **416**, and an upper-plate gate **422** that is formed on gate oxide layer **420**. Further, varactor **400** additionally includes an oxide spacer **424** that is formed over PLDD region **418** to adjoin a side wall of gate **422**.

FIG. 5 shows a graph **500** that illustrates the operation of varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention. Graph **500** utilizes a line $C_{INVENTION}$ to identify the capaci-

tance C across varactor **400** for a voltage V across varactor **400**. Graph **500** also illustrates line $C_{CONVENTIONAL}$ from FIG. **2** to illustrate the differences between varactor **400** and varactor **100**. As with varactor **100**, when the voltage V across varactor **400** ranges from a negative value to a positive value, the capacitance C across varactor **400** increases.

In accordance with the present invention, however, varactor **400** has a much larger linear tuning range than varactor **100**. For example, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **414** and a voltage ranging from $-0.19V$ to $+0.5$ is applied to gate **422**, the capacitance C substantially linearly increases from approximately 6.8×10^{-16} farads to approximately 1.55×10^{-15} farads.

Thus, as shown in FIG. **5**, with respect to the linear tuning range, varactor **400** has a lower linear endpoint of approximately 6.8×10^{-16} farads that is substantially less than the lower linear endpoint of approximately 9.0×10^{-16} farads of varactor **100**. In addition, varactor **400** has an upper linear endpoint at approximately 1.55×10^{-15} farads that is slightly higher than the upper linear endpoint of varactor **100** at approximately 1.5×10^{-15} farads.

FIGS. **6A-6B** show cross-sectional diagrams that illustrate the operation of varactor **400** at the linear endpoints in accordance with the present invention. As shown in FIG. **6A**, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **414** and the lower linear endpoint of $-0.19V$ is applied to upper-plate gate **422**, the negative voltage causes a depletion region **610** to be formed in the lower-plate region **416** of n- well **412**.

The capacitance of varactor **400** in this condition is defined by the thickness of gate oxide layer **420** and the charge on lower-plate region **416** which, in turn, is defined by depletion region **610**. Depletion region **610** is larger than depletion region **310** because of the presence of PLDD region **418**. As a result, the capacitance at the lower linear endpoint of varactor **400** is substantially less than the capacitance at the lower linear endpoint of varactor **100**.

As shown in FIG. **6B**, when ground is applied to n+ diffusion region **414** and the upper linear endpoint of $+0.5V$ is applied to upper-plate gate **422**, the positive voltage causes a negative charge **612** to collect (or accumulate) in the lower-plate region **416** of n- well **412**.

The capacitance of varactor **400** in this condition is defined by the thickness of gate oxide layer **420** and the charge on lower-plate region **416** which, in turn, is defined by negative charge **612**. PLDD region **418** reduces the value of negative charge **612**. However, at the upper endpoint voltages, negative charge **612** is larger than negative charge **312** because varactor **400** responds linearly to a much larger range of gate voltages.

Thus, although PLDD region **418** reduces the value of negative charge **612**, an upper endpoint voltage of $+0.5V$ allows slightly more negative charge to accumulate in lower-plate region **416** than can accumulate in lower-plate region **116** of varactor **100** using an upper endpoint voltage of $+0.25V$. As a result, the capacitance at the upper linear endpoint of varactor **400** is somewhat higher than the capacitance at the upper linear endpoint of varactor **100**. Thus, the present invention provides a semiconductor varactor that has a linear tuning range that is substantially larger than the linear tuning range of prior art varactors.

FIG. **7** shows a graph **700** that further illustrates the operation of varactor **400** in accordance with the present invention. Graph **700** utilizes a line $Q_{INVENTION}$ to identify the quality factor Q of varactor **400** for a range of voltages V across varactor **400** operating at a rate of 5 GHz. (The Q factor is defined as $\text{Im}(Y_{11})/\text{Re}(Y_{11})$.) Graph **700** also

utilizes a line $Q_{CONVENTIONAL}$ to identify the quality factor Q of varactor **100** to illustrate the differences between varactor **400** and varactor **100**.

As shown in FIG. **7**, although the quality factor Q of varactor **400** is less than the quality factor Q of varactor **100**, the quality factor Q of varactor **400** is still suitable. Thus, a semiconductor varactor has been described that provides a substantially larger linear tuning range while still maintaining a reasonable quality factor.

The present invention is also easily incorporated into a conventional CMOS or BiCMOS process flow. FIGS. **8A-8G** show cross-sectional diagrams that illustrate a method of forming a circuit **800** in accordance with the present invention. Circuit **800**, in turn, includes a NMOS transistor, a PMOS transistor, and varactor **400**.

As shown in FIG. **8A**, the process of the present invention utilizes a conventionally formed wafer **810** that includes a p- material **812**, such as a substrate or an epitaxial layer, and a n- well **814** that is conventionally formed in material **812**. In addition, wafer **810** includes a n- well **816** that is conventionally formed in material **812**, and optionally includes a p- well **818** that is formed in material **812**.

As described below, the NMOS transistor is formed in p- material **812** or p- well **818**, the PMOS transistor is formed in n- well **814**, and varactor **400** is formed in n- well **816**. In addition, wafer **810** also includes a number of conventionally-formed field oxide regions FOX that are utilized to isolate adjacent regions.

The process of the present invention begins by forming a layer of screen oxide **820** on material **812**, followed by the formation and patterning of a NMOS threshold voltage mask **822** on oxide layer **820**. Mask **822** is patterned to expose the surface of oxide layer **820** over p- material **812** or p- well **818**.

Once threshold voltage mask **822** has been patterned, the exposed region of oxide layer **820** and the underlying region of material **812** (or p- well **818**) are implanted with a dopant, such as boron, to set the threshold voltage of the to-be-formed NMOS transistor. Threshold voltage mask **822** is then removed.

Following this, a PMOS threshold voltage mask (not shown) is formed and patterned on oxide layer **820**. The PMOS threshold voltage mask is patterned to expose the surface of oxide layer **820** over n- well **814**. Once the PMOS threshold voltage mask has been patterned, the exposed regions of oxide layer **820** and the underlying region of n- well **814** are implanted with a dopant, such as boron, to set the threshold voltage of the to-be-formed PMOS transistor. After this, screen oxide layer **820** is removed.

As described, n- well **816** is protected during both threshold voltage implants. Alternately, NMOS threshold voltage mask **822** and/or the PMOS threshold voltage mask can be modified to allow the dopant to be introduced into a lower-plate region **824** (or all) of n- well **816** to vary the dopant concentration of lower-plate region **824**.

Next, as shown in FIG. **8B**, a layer of gate oxide **830** is formed on material **812**, followed by the formation of a layer of polysilicon (poly) **832** on gate oxide **830**. Poly layer **832** can be formed undoped, with a light p- type dopant concentration, or with a light n- type dopant concentration. Further, additional masking and doping steps can be utilized to form regions of poly layer **832** with specific dopant types and concentrations.

Next, a gate definition mask **834** is formed and patterned on poly layer **832**. Gate definition mask **834** is patterned to protect a NMOS gate region of poly layer **832** over material

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812 or p- well **818**, a PMOS gate region of poly layer **832** over n- well **814**, and a varactor gate region of poly layer **832** over n- well **816**.

Next, as shown in FIG. **8C**, the exposed regions of poly layer **832** are etched until poly layer **832** is removed from the underlying layer of gate oxide **830**. The etch forms a NMOS gate **836** of the to-be-formed NMOS transistor over material **812** (or p- well **818**), a PMOS gate **838** of the to-be-formed PMOS transistor over n- well **814**, and a varactor gate **840** of varactor **400** over n- well **816**. Mask **834** is then removed.

Following this, as shown in FIG. **8D**, a first mask **842** is formed and patterned on oxide layer **830** and gates **838** and **840** to expose lightly-doped drain and source regions on oxide layer **830** over material **812** or p- well **818**. (Mask **842** can alternately be formed to protect NMOS gate **836**. In addition, mask **842** can be formed to expose varactor gate **840**.)

Once mask **842** has been patterned, the exposed regions of oxide layer **830** and the underlying region of material **812** (or p- well **818**) are implanted with a dopant, such as phosphorous or arsenic. The implant forms a n- drain region **844** and a n- source region **846** in material **812** or p- well **818** on opposite sides of NMOS gate **836**. (N- regions **844** and **846** have a dopant concentration equal to a n- lightly-doped drain (NLDD) region.) Mask **842** is then stripped.

Next, as shown in FIG. **8E**, a second mask **850** is formed and patterned on oxide layer **830** and gate **836** to expose lightly-doped regions on oxide layer **830** over n- well **814** and n- well **816**. (Mask **850** can alternately be formed to protect PMOS gate **838**. In addition, mask **850** can be formed to protect varactor gate **840**.)

Once mask **850** has been patterned, the exposed regions of oxide layer **830** and the underlying regions of n- wells **814** and **816** are implanted with a dopant, such as boron. The implant forms a p- drain region **852** and a p- source region **854** on opposite sides of PMOS gate **838** and a p- region **852** and a p- region **854** on opposite sides of varactor gate **840**. (P- regions **852** and **854** have a dopant concentration equal to a p- lightly-doped drain (PLDD) region.) Mask **850** is then stripped.

After this, as shown in FIG. **8F**, a layer of oxide is deposited on oxide layer **830** and gates **836**, **838**, and **840**, and then anisotropically etched back to form isolation spacers **856**. Next, an n+ mask **858** is formed and patterned on oxide layer **830** and PMOS gate **838** to expose regions on oxide layer **830** over material **812** or p- well **818**, and n- well **816**. (Mask **858** can be formed to protect NMOS gate **836**. In addition, mask **858**, can be formed to protect varactor gate **840**.)

Once mask **858** has been patterned, the exposed region of oxide layer **830** and the underlying region of material **812** (or p- well **818**) and n- well **816** are implanted with a dopant, such as phosphorous or arsenic. The implant forms n+ drain region **860** and n+ source region **862** on opposite sides of NMOS gate **836** and n+ region **860** and n+ region **862** on opposite sides of varactor gate **840**. Mask **858** is then stripped.

Next, as shown in FIG. **8G**, a second source and drain mask **864** is formed and patterned on oxide layer **830**, NMOS gate **836**, and varactor gate **840** to expose a source region and a drain region on oxide layer **830** over n- well **814**. (Mask **864** can alternately be formed to protect PMOS gate **838**. In addition, mask **864** can be formed to expose varactor gate **840**.)

Once mask **864** has been patterned, the exposed regions of oxide layer **830** and the underlying regions of n- well **814** are implanted with a dopant, such as boron. The implant

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forms a p+ drain region **870** and a p+ source region **872** on opposite sides of PMOS gate **838**. Mask **864** is then stripped. Following this, method **800** continues with conventional steps.

Thus, a method has been described for forming a varactor with an increased tuning range that requires no additional processing steps beyond the steps that are conventionally utilized to form NMOS and PMOS transistors. Varactor **400** is formed using substantially the same steps that are used to form a PMOS transistor, with an exception being that varactor **400** is formed with a n+ diffused region rather than a p+ source/drain region.

As a result, the method of the present invention can be easily integrated into an existing CMOS or BiCMOS fabrication process, requiring only modifications to existing masks. Thus, the present invention provides a method of forming a varactor with an increased tuning range that is easily integratable into existing processes.

It should be understood that various alternatives to the invention described herein may be employed in practicing the invention. For example, although the present invention has been described in terms of an n- well with n+ and p- diffusion regions, the present invention also applies to a p- well with p+ and n- diffusion regions. Thus, it is intended that the following claims define the scope of the invention and that methods and structures within the scope of these claims and their equivalents be covered thereby.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of forming a varactor in a first semiconductor region, the first semiconductor region having a first conductivity type and a first dopant concentration, the method comprising:

forming a layer of isolation material over the first semiconductor region;

forming a layer of second semiconductor material on the layer of isolation material;

etching the layer of second semiconductor material to form a first gate on the layer of isolation material;

forming a first diffusion region in the first semiconductor region to contact the first semiconductor region, the first diffusion region having a second conductivity type and a second dopant concentration;

forming a spacer over the first diffusion region to adjoin the first gate; and

forming a second diffusion region in the first semiconductor region to contact the first semiconductor region and adjoin the first diffusion region, the second diffusion region being formed after the first diffusion region, and having the first conductivity type and a third dopant concentration that is greater than the first dopant concentration.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the first semiconductor region has a top surface, the first diffusion region extends from the top surface a first distance vertically below the top surface, the second diffusion region extends from the top surface a second distance vertically below the top surface, the second distance being greater than the first distance.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the first semiconductor region is a well formed in a semiconductor material.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the first diffusion region lies between a point that contacts the top surface vertically below the first gate and the second diffusion region.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the first gate is doped when the first diffusion region is formed.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the first gate is doped when the second diffusion region is formed.

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7. The method of claim 1 wherein the first semiconductor region has a top surface, and the first and second diffusion regions both contact the top surface of the first semiconductor region after the second diffusion region has been formed.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the second semiconductor material includes polysilicon.

9. The method of claim 7 wherein:

when the layer of isolation material is formed, the layer of isolation material is formed over a second semiconductor region, the second semiconductor region being spaced-apart from the first semiconductor region, and having the first conductivity type and the first dopant concentration;

when the layer of second semiconductor material is formed, the layer of second semiconductor material is formed on the layer of isolation material over the second semiconductor region;

when the layer of second semiconductor material is etched, a second gate is formed on the layer of isolation material over the second semiconductor region; and

when the first diffusion region is formed, spaced-apart third diffusion regions are formed in the second semiconductor region, the spaced-apart third diffusion regions have the second conductivity type and the second dopant concentration.

10. The method of claim 9 and further comprising forming spaced-apart fourth diffusion regions in the second semiconductor region to adjoin the spaced-apart third diffusion regions, the spaced-apart fourth diffusion regions having the second conductivity type and a fourth dopant concentration that is greater than the second dopant concentration.

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11. The method of claim 9 wherein the spaced-apart third diffusion regions lie between the spaced-apart fourth diffusion regions.

12. The method of claim 9 wherein the first and second semiconductor regions are wells formed in a semiconductor material.

13. The method of claim 9 wherein:

when the layer of isolation material is formed, the layer of isolation material is formed over a third semiconductor region, the third semiconductor region being spaced-apart from the first and second semiconductor regions, and having the second conductivity type;

when the layer of second semiconductor material is formed, the layer of second semiconductor material is formed on the layer of isolation material over the third semiconductor region;

when the layer of second semiconductor material is etched, a third gate is formed on the layer of isolation material over the third semiconductor region; and

when the second diffusion region is formed, spaced-apart fourth diffusion regions are formed in the third semiconductor region, the spaced-apart fourth diffusion regions have the first conductivity type and the third dopant concentration.

14. The method of claim 9 wherein the first and second gates are doped when the first diffusion region and the spaced-apart third diffusion regions are formed.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the first gate is doped when the second diffusion region is formed.

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